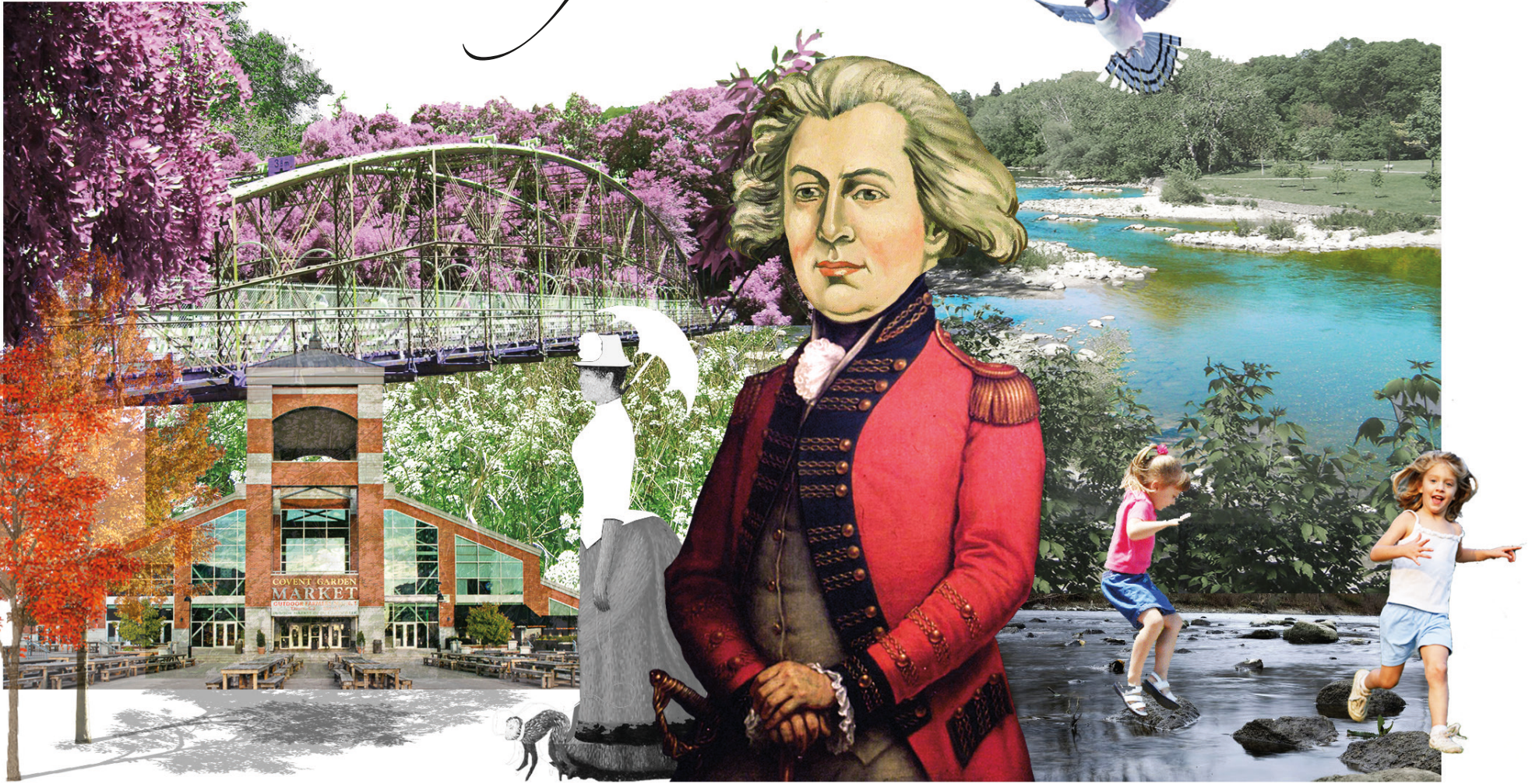


# *The Ribbon of the Thames*



# The Ribbon of the Thames

*Most Honourable Lieutenant Governor Simcoe:*

*You will note from the frontispiece to our letter that your town has changed since your late departure. The vision and values that you planted have taken root and grown into a vibrant citizenry. The roads, structures and institutions that you imagined have grown and matured. Children play amongst the sites of nature and heritage, and an engaging sense of pride lays well upon the community.*

*The Forks of the Thames, where you once strode, have grown up. They are surrounded by prosperous homes and businesses, schools and churches, and a general pleasant humour in the good air of Ontario. You once stood here looking west along the joined rivers, and dreamed of a great city. In the event of your return you will be proud of the city, but you may not feel the same about the River. With your permission, we hope to change that.*

*We enclose herein our humble ideas and thoughts for the repatriation of the Thames as a citizen in the highest standing among many. We have spent much time here and learned much about London as a city, a community and a landscape. The “Ribbon of the Thames”, as we have come to call it, is no doubt an important asset. Yet, there is room for improvement. To the good, it is cleaner, safer, and more predictable than many rivers we know. To the bad, it should be much cleaner, more natural, more accessible to the City’s good citizens.*

*We present these ideas to bring a richer life to the People, more importance to the River, more diversity and sustainability to Nature, and more economic diversity, vibrancy and joy to the City. We offer these themes to guide your eyes as you review our work, and hope they are pleased.*

*Loyal regards,*

*Your humblest servants*

## Table of Contents

|                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Our Vision              | Page 3 |
| Design Approach         |        |
| River Corridor          | 5      |
| The Forks               | 17     |
| SOHO Neighbourhood      | 23     |
| Capital Costs + Phasing | 27     |

## *A Place for All Seasons*

### **Winter**

*The city awakens on a bright winter day. New snow sparkles on the trees, the ice on the river glistens. People are getting up, starting their day jogging, skating, and walking along the Thames. The crisp air and natural scene are just minutes from home. My day starts refreshed and happy.*

### **Spring**

*New parents, their kids in strollers, are out walking on this spring afternoon, getting themselves some fresh air and exercise, exposing young children to sun, sky, leaves, birds; ready to get home to prepare for homework and family dinner to round out the day.*

### **Summer**

*Workers and shoppers from Dundas Street wander away from the August sun and into the shady grove that surrounds the river. Though the air is heavy and still, the shade, smells, and view of the moving stream offer relief. Sometimes getting into nature can be so important, and so simple.*

### **Fall**

*Walking from work to my home in Old South, I see a pair of Canvasbacks fly over on their route south. They follow the river, their guide, sustenance and protection. The day brisk, the sun getting low, it's time to relax and enjoy home.*

## Our Vision

Imagine a Great City united by a ribbon of life, water and nature- a place where residents and visitors alike gather to celebrate what it is to live in and experience London. The Ribbon of the Thames will be a system that is resilient to a changing climate, enabling a rich culture and heritage, activating a healthy community, and sustaining the interplay of people and place. We imagine a mingling of parks and recreational uses, ecologically sound design solutions, responsive engineering, diversified habitats, improved water quality, a range of opportunities for personal experiences and gatherings, all tailored precisely to their place along the river and their connection into the neighborhoods.

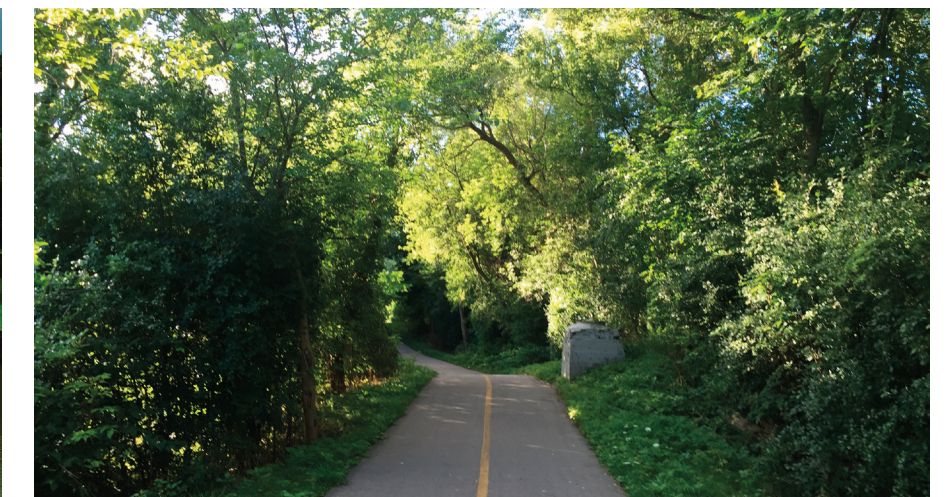
Back to the River is the pivotal step in achieving this Vision. Our design integrates and balances many forces and factors into a cohesive, connected and accessible river. Our most important inspiration is to develop places, spaces, venues, connections and movements that enable the broadest possible range of personal experiences. Each person who experiences The Ribbon of the Thames will do so in their own way because of the weather, their mood, their companions, or because of the events or activities that they encounter. Then, in today's digitally-linked world, they will tell others about what it means to them. This is today's foundation of community and social cohesion - enjoying shared experiences in the public arena.



The river will once again become central to life in London, as it was for Lieutenant Governor Simcoe and the early settlers.

The Ribbon of the Thames will invite people to experience it in new ways. Our proposal will activate the river by adding pathways, places to stop and be alone, places to be together with others; serene places of restored nature, places to play in the water, places to gather and perform, places to celebrate, to see and be seen. The secret to a healthy and active community is in making their public realm interesting, satisfying, connected and overlapping. As abstract as these words may seem, think about how you will experience our proposal through the seasons and ask if your children and grandchildren will enjoy these experiences too. If the answer is yes, we are going in the right direction.

The words, images and ideas that you find here are incomplete. We believe that design grows through communion with people and place. And while we have spent time in the place and experiencing the people, the limited calendar of a design competition does not allow the dialogue, the stories and the understanding that comes from listening. We have done our best, but in dialogue with you we can do better.





A lazy fall day at the river in Harris Park.

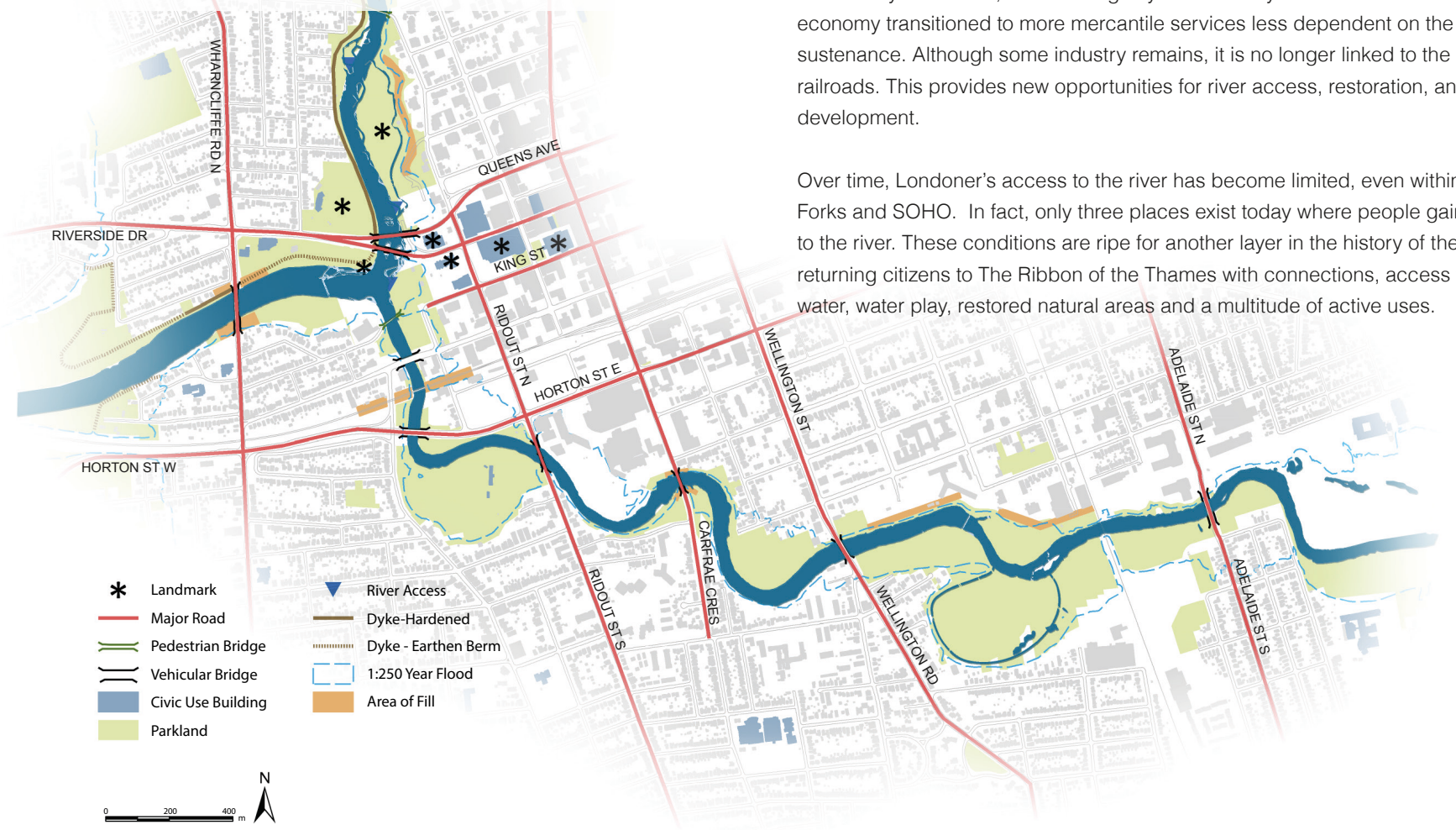
# The River Corridor

## A Maturing Vision of the City

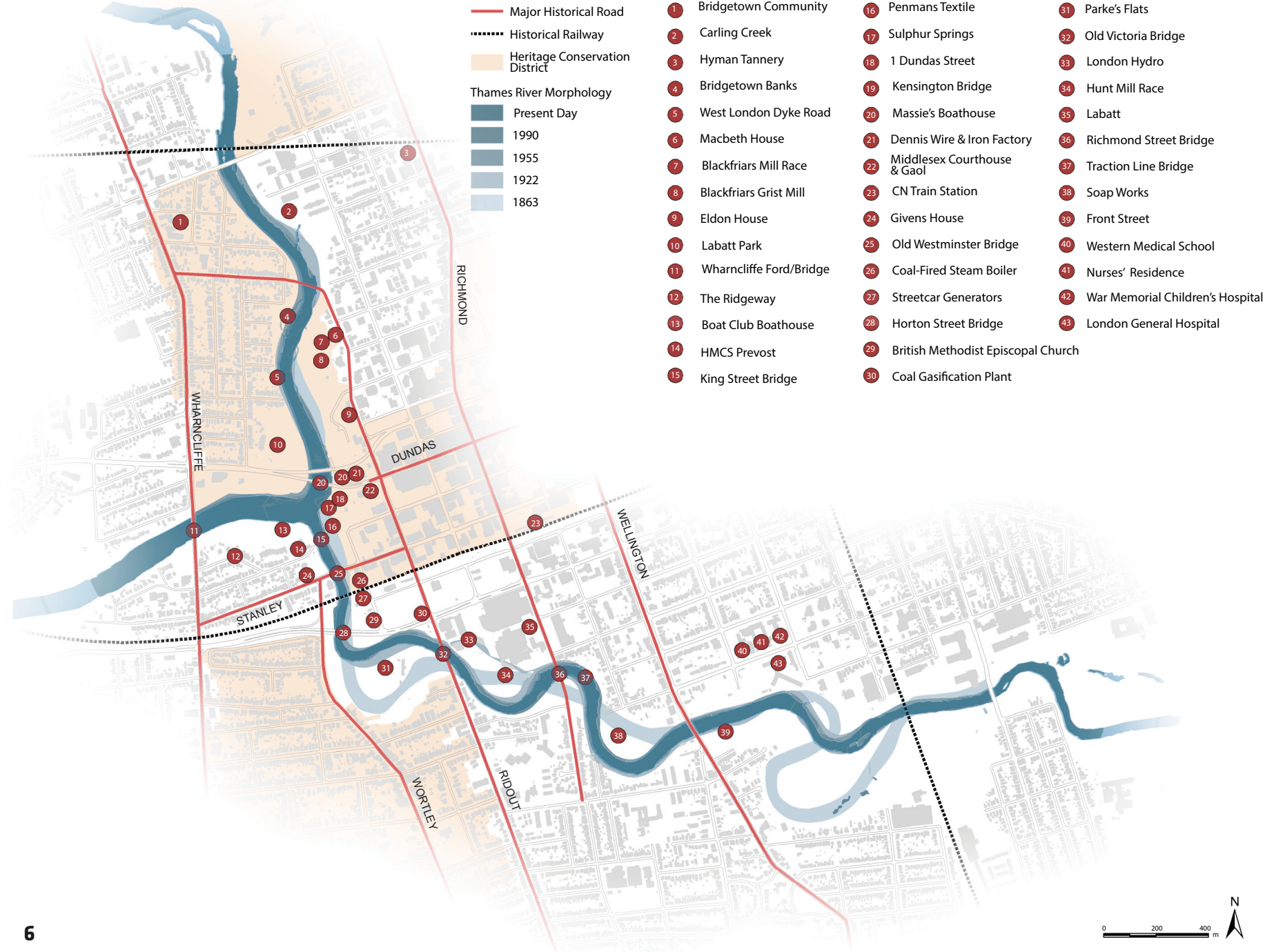
London is an old city that has developed through cycles - early settlement for defense, river and rail based industries, center of a farming region, hub of education, and so on. Since World War II many efforts have been made to bring the Thames back to life with improved soil and water conservation upstream, dams, bank protections, water quality initiatives and substantial acquisitions of flood prone properties, parks and trails within the city boundaries. Back to the River is not new at all - it is the logical extension of the progressive but responsible thinking that has always characterized the culture and leadership of London.

This map, the Existing Framework shows both the key opportunities and disconnects that Back to the River must overcome. If you look at the grey patterns of streets and buildings, you see the tentative relationship of neighborhood to river. Only a few early buildings, notably Eldon House, are sited because of the river. Built in 1834 for John Harris, the London District Treasurer, his home sits proudly overlooking the river, its valley and the horizon. But most buildings throughout the city turn their back to the river. In Bridgetown, recurring flooding required the protection of a dyke, first built after the flood of 1883. In other areas like Carling's Creek, the Soap Works or London Hydro, the river was a critical source of energy for industry. Over time, the maturing city moved away from the river as the economy transitioned to more mercantile services less dependent on the river for sustenance. Although some industry remains, it is no longer linked to the river or railroads. This provides new opportunities for river access, restoration, and infill development.

Over time, Londoner's access to the river has become limited, even within the Forks and SOHO. In fact, only three places exist today where people gain access to the river. These conditions are ripe for another layer in the history of the city, returning citizens to The Ribbon of the Thames with connections, access to the water, water play, restored natural areas and a multitude of active uses.



# Origins and Meanings



# The River Corridor

## Origins and Meanings

Lt. Governor Simcoe came to the Forks after the American Revolution proposing to develop and enjoy a great territory between the Great Lakes. After a rebellion in 1837, the British built a garrison. Realizing soldiers prefer beer over water, local farmers found springs on the north and south Branches - where the Carlings and Labatts built their breweries. Soon roads and rail expanded from the confluence to connect young London in all directions. Industries grew, settlement expanded and an important center of Canada emerged. With the addition of hydro power to pump the waters at Springbank, the development of rail from Port Stanley, and the coal, goods and young entrepreneurs coming from America, London prospered with growth, innovation and industry.

London has since become a city of great lineages that still matter. Strong people, -- Beck, Labatt, Carling, Kingsmill, and so many more, built lasting institutions, businesses, and infrastructure. Their imprint remains today in the patterns and places that we value. Each of them built near and depended on the river for water, food, beauty and retreat. As we develop Back to the River into detailed design we intend to build on the presence of the many origins and meanings that line the river corridor.

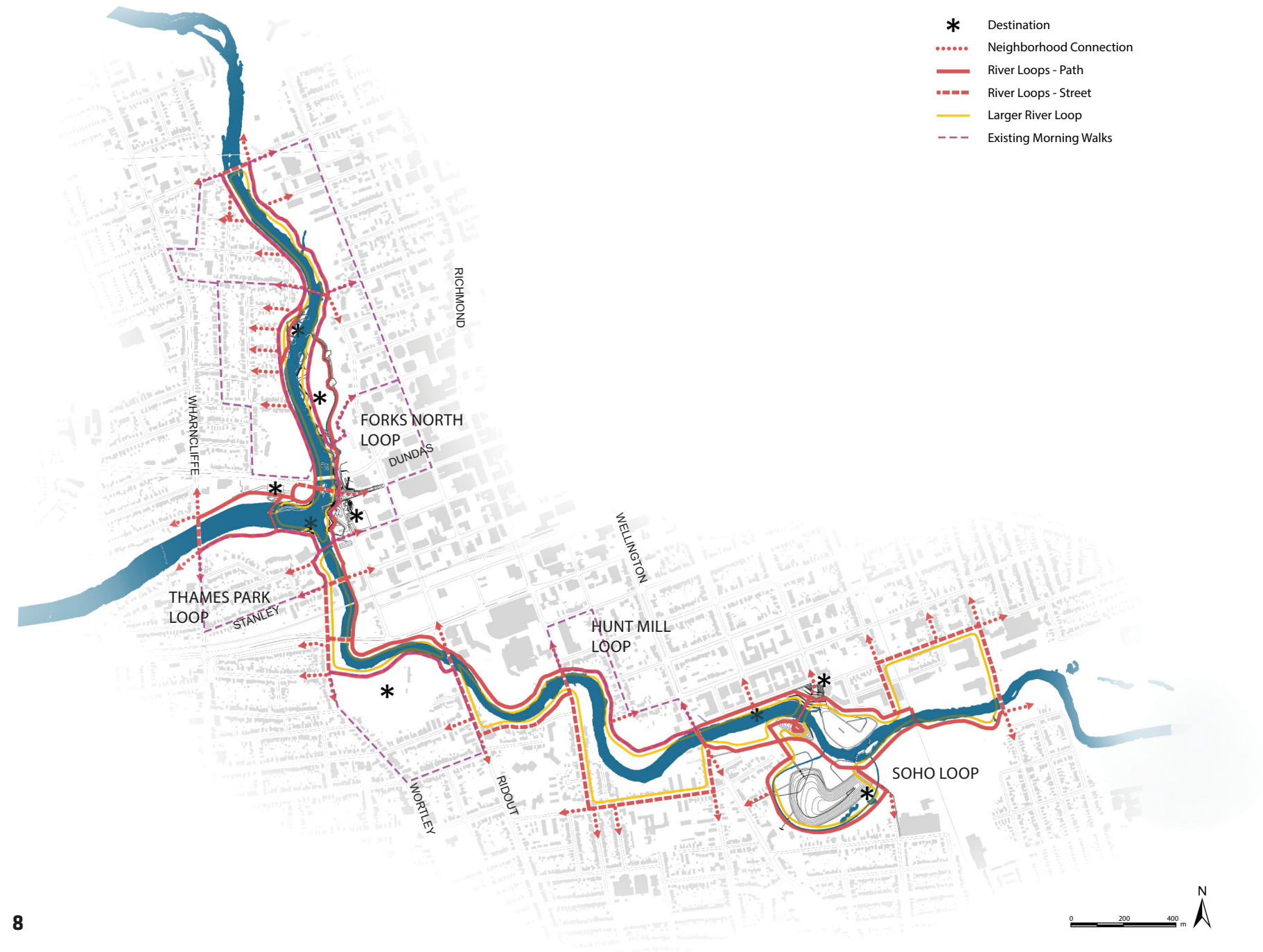


This historic view shows how everything clustered around the Forks.



The Blackfriars and Old Victoria bridges were purchased from the Wrought Iron Bridge Company of Canton, Ohio, and immediately united the growing towns into one community.

## Beauty of a Nice Walk



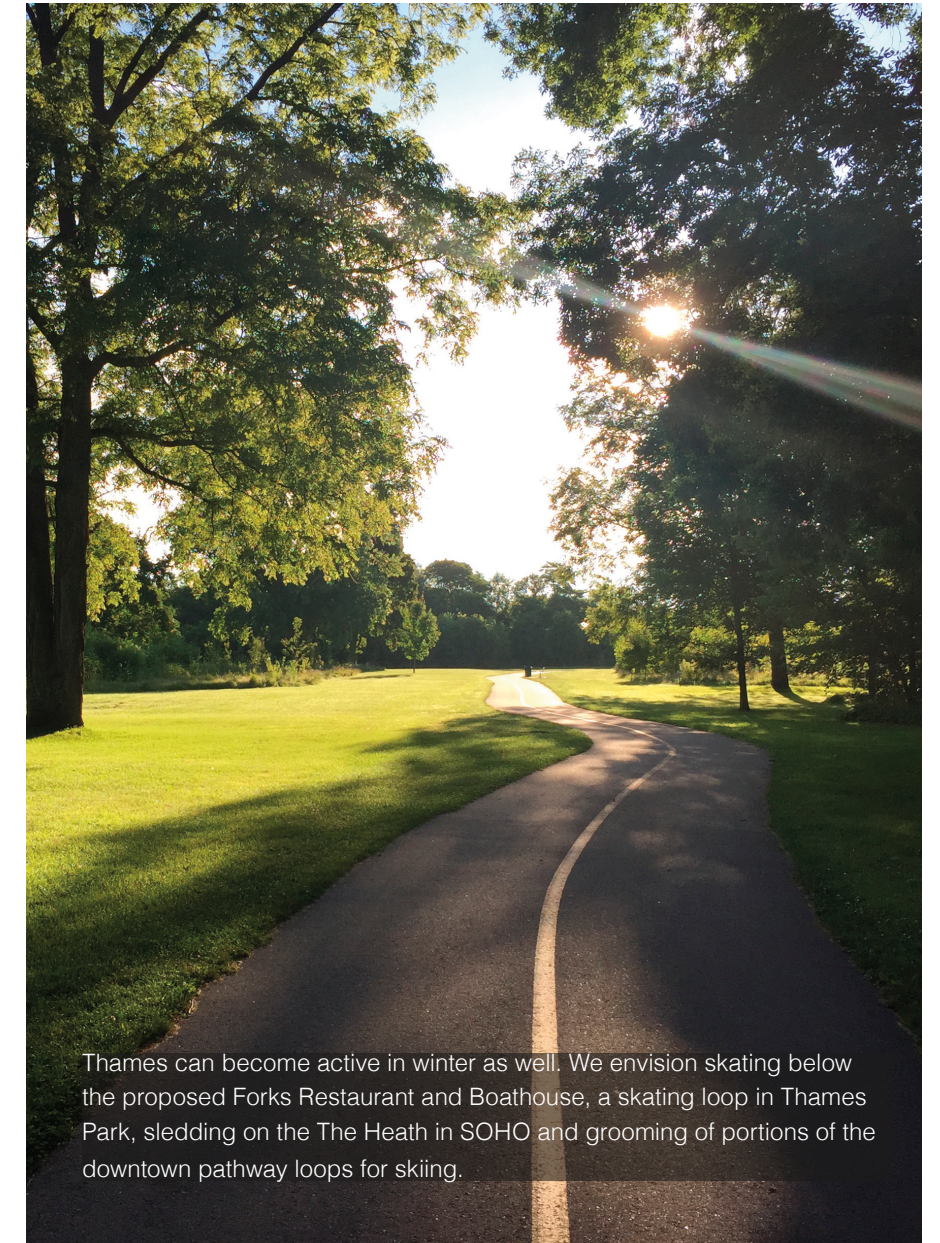
### The Beauty of a Nice Walk

We took a long walk along the Thames, working our way from above the Blackfriars Bridge to below the Old Victoria Hospital site. The Thames touches so many important places in London --heritage sites, ecological sites, both charming and challenged neighbourhoods, the core of downtown, reminders of an industrial past, and quiet, natural places. Yet we can imagine a richer and even more beautiful walk. There are barriers and disconnects, difficult streets, private properties, derelict and disorienting places, and just one pleasant pedestrian and bicycle place to cross without the danger or presence of vehicles.

Our proposal for The Ribbon of the Thames focuses on two things. First, we propose to improve neighbourhood connections for people and bikes to the river while expanding that system itself to create a series of interconnected “loops” for movement. Second, over time we propose to systematically make in-channel, streambank, riparian, wetland and upland improvements to habitats for wildlife health and human enjoyment.

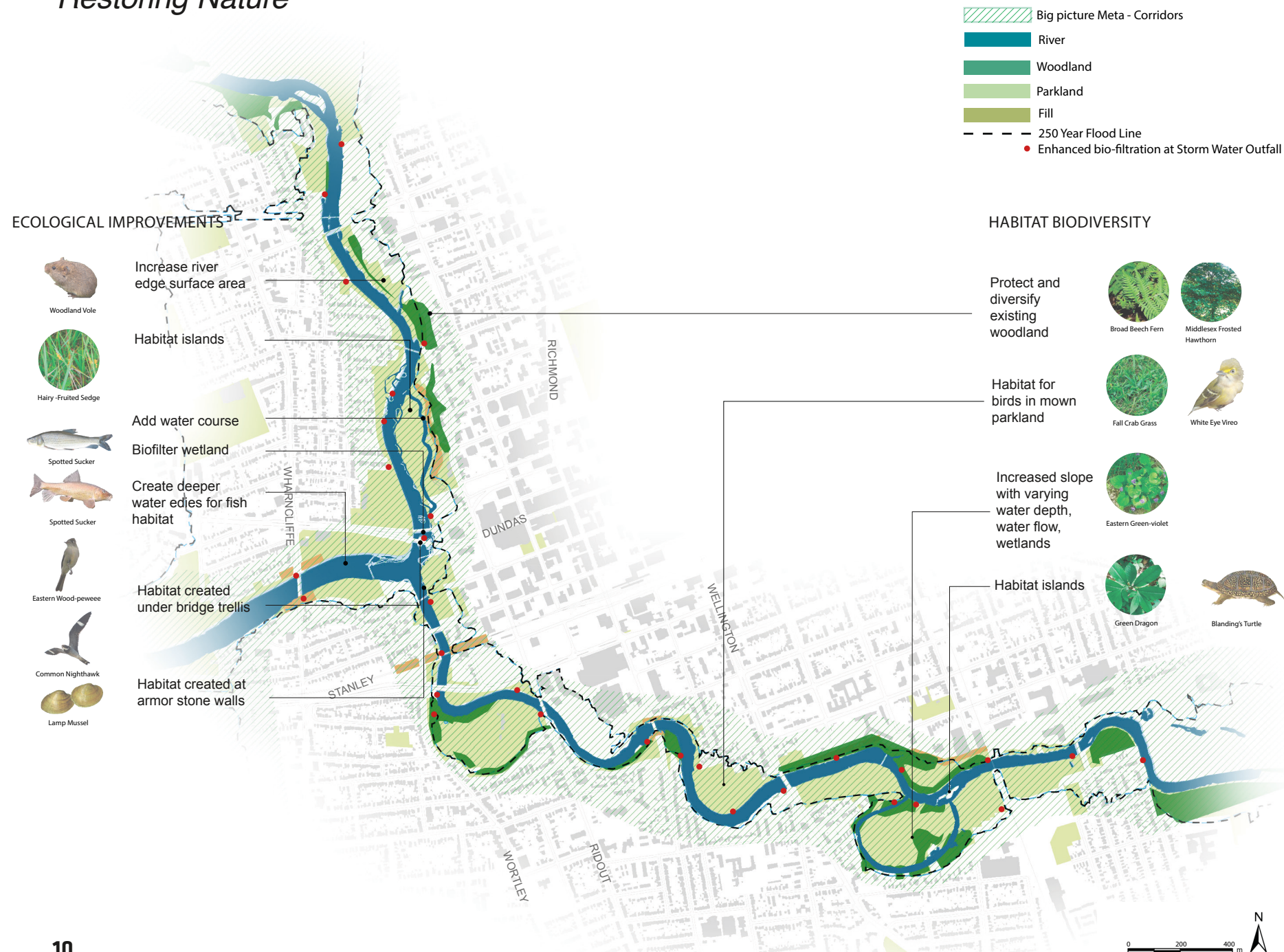
We propose expansion and improvement of the pathway systems, building new links where they don't currently exist, including new bridges at the Forks and SOHO. The bridges enable a variety of loops on which people can walk, jog, bike, ski or snowshoe. We innately desire to move from place to place, seeking high places for oversight, moving from scale to scale in a manner that contributes to our sense of safety and wellbeing. Short and long trail loops from home, work, or between destinations enable natural walks of varied lengths. This disperses people throughout the river corridor, allowing for overlapping social encounters, interest and a sense of security. More simply, our proposal is to enable natural walks, in natural places.

We are also proposing three new 10' wide, multi-use nature loops at Bridgetown Banks to get near the water in the forest, at the restored Blackfriar's Millrace at the base of the hill in Harris Park, and at the SOHO Oxbow. Each of these walks will become destinations where people and kids can play in the water, look for wildlife, insects and birds, and touch nature first hand in restored places.



Thames can become active in winter as well. We envision skating below the proposed Forks Restaurant and Boathouse, a skating loop in Thames Park, sledding on the The Heath in SOHO and grooming of portions of the downtown pathway loops for skiing.

# Restoring Nature



# The River Corridor

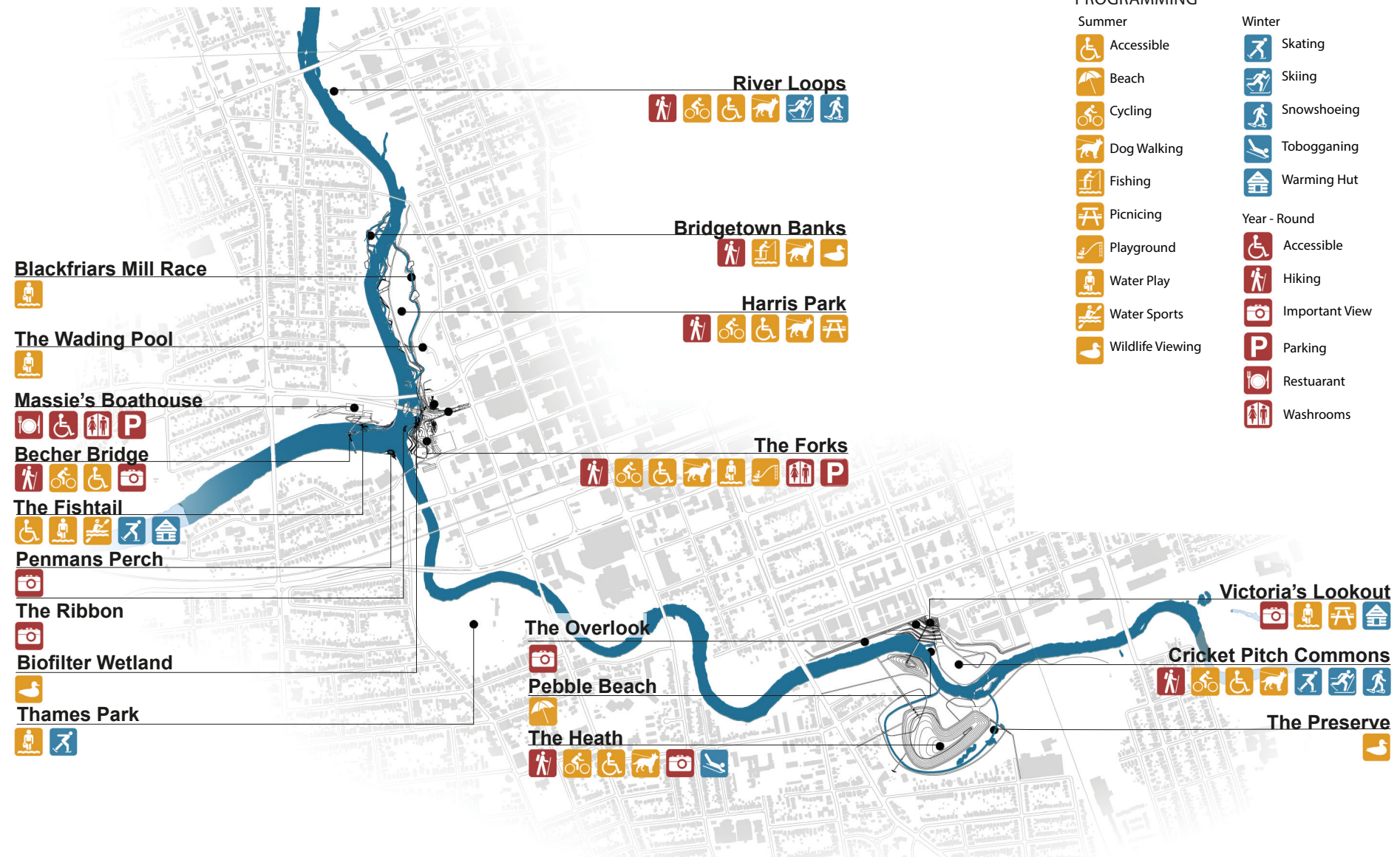


## Restoring Nature

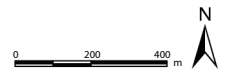
We propose a number of ways in which the water quality and natural habitats can be improved as part of the project. If we can make nature more healthy and sustainable, we will make The Ribbon of the Thames more enjoyable and memorable. Our concepts are focused on improving water quality and natural habitat within the river and the riparian zone. They will not increase the water surface or increase flows. We intend to work with the river's natural hydraulics, scour and sediment transport dynamics to increase oxygenation, infiltrate water onto riparian wetlands and terraces, provide additional shade to the water, and to do these things in ways that increase public safety and require little new maintenance.

These concepts are based on our long experience with the Thames and a solid understanding of the natural processes that determine the river's form and function. We work with the river, not against it. This creates unique opportunities for interpretive programs and experiences that will increase the connection of people to their river.

# Everyone's River



The above maps show a wide array of places, activities and programs that can be developed along the Ribbon of the Thames. It is critical to integrate a wide variety of things to do into the loops that will be developed. This will distribute people throughout the many places created, along the corridor, increasing social activity and fostering security.



# The River Corridor

## Everyone's River, All Four Seasons

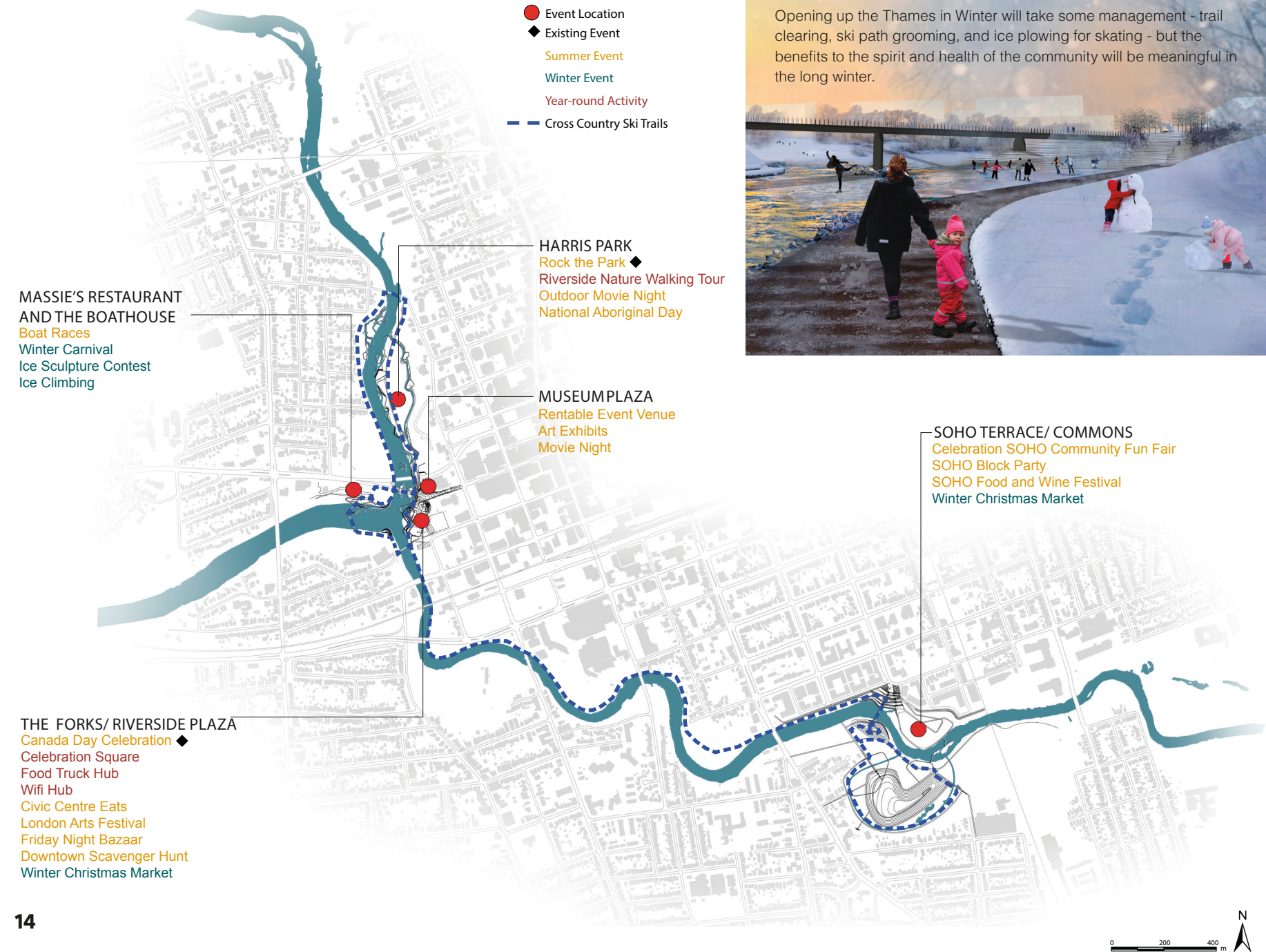
The City of London and The Thames has great potential to be much more integrated than it is today. While the City's parks, paths, and bridges create physical connections, a cohesive open space system establishes the shared meaning and communal experiences that people enjoy and remember-walking, relaxing, having a picnic, playing a game, fishing, birdwatching, feeling the wind, smelling the forest, jogging, reading, and so much more. If each person that comes to the river experiences something they value, many people will feel, enjoy, share, and value those experiences. This sharing and overlap is at the foundation of building community in our modern, hyper-connected world. In spite of all our technologies, people value these personal experiences. They want to share them with friends via social media. Creating places that matter to people because they mean something personal may be the most powerful force in community-building today.

The concepts presented are based on our long-experience with the Thames and a solid understanding of the natural processes that determine the river's form and function. We work with the river, not against it. This creates unique opportunities for interpretive programs and experiences that will increase the connection of people to their river.

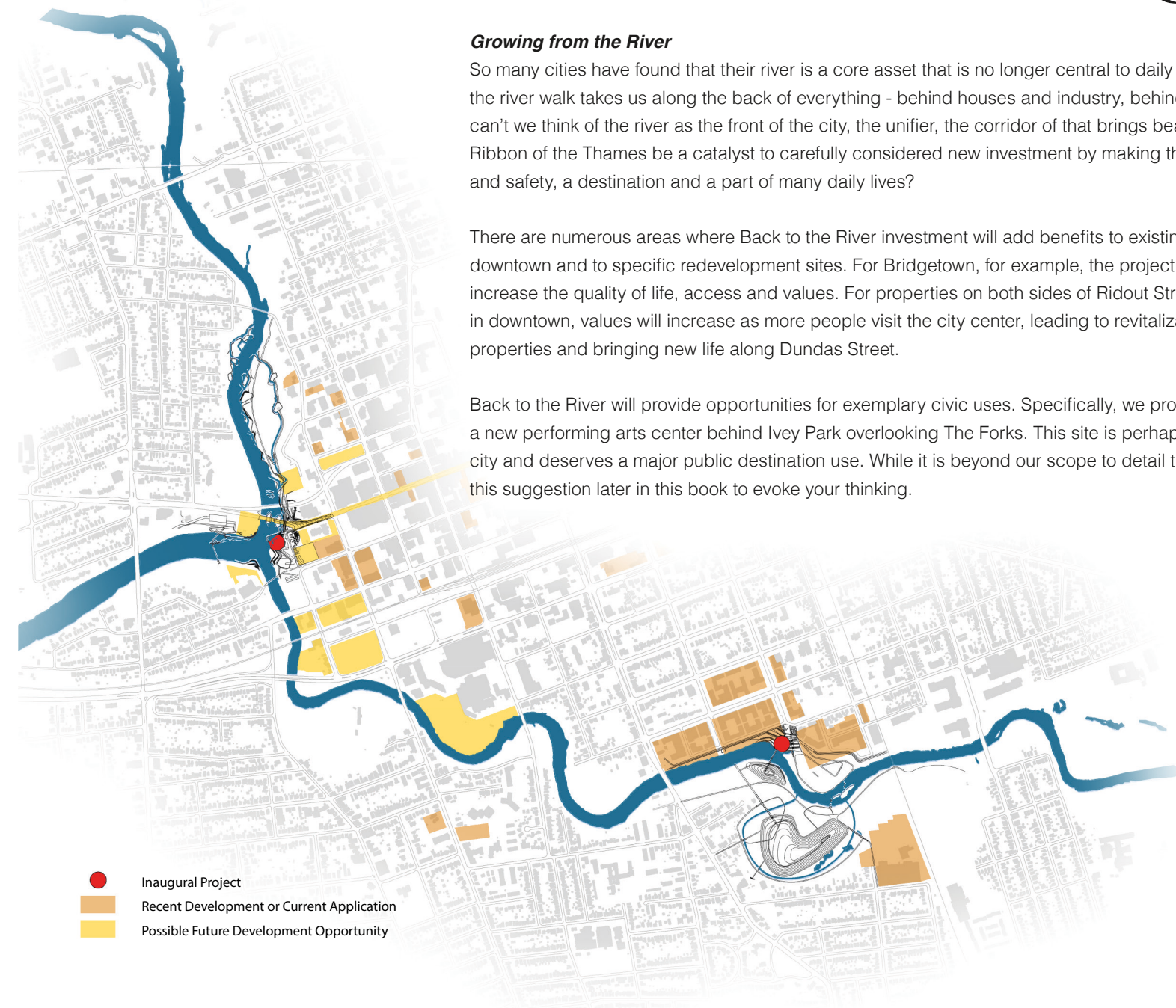




## All Four Seasons



## Growing from the River



### Growing from the River

So many cities have found that their river is a core asset that is no longer central to daily life. Often we feel that the river walk takes us along the back of everything - behind houses and industry, behind empty lots. Yet why can't we think of the river as the front of the city, the unifier, the corridor of that brings beauty and value? Can The Ribbon of the Thames be a catalyst to carefully considered new investment by making the river a place of health and safety, a destination and a part of many daily lives?

There are numerous areas where Back to the River investment will add benefits to existing neighborhoods, downtown and to specific redevelopment sites. For Bridgetown, for example, the project offers benefits that will increase the quality of life, access and values. For properties on both sides of Ridout Street north, south and in downtown, values will increase as more people visit the city center, leading to revitalization of underutilized properties and bringing new life along Dundas Street.

Back to the River will provide opportunities for exemplary civic uses. Specifically, we propose the development of a new performing arts center behind Ivey Park overlooking The Forks. This site is perhaps the most iconic in the city and deserves a major public destination use. While it is beyond our scope to detail this, we have illustrated this suggestion later in this book to evoke your thinking.